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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ISLAMABAD 016140

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SUBJECT: PAKISTAN EARTHQUAKE: PARTS SHORTAGE MAY SOON
GROUND PAKISTANI MI-17 RELIEF OPERATIONS

REF: A. ISLAMABAD 15861

1B. STATE 196411

Classified By: Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker, Reasons 1.5 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary and introduction: Since October 8, Pakistan's Army Aviation has kept its fleet of heavy-lift MI-17 helicopters in the air flying daily sorties transporting relief supplies to areas devastated the South Asian earthquake. To accomplish this dramatic shift in its mission, resourceful Army Aviation maintenance crews have turned to cannibalizing grounded MI-17s for parts after having quickly depleting their normal stockpiles of parts. A shortage of replacement parts will increasingly impair Army Aviation support for earthquake relief operations, as helo sorties decline because aircraft must wait for maintenance (Ref A). Post estimates that an infusion of USD 16 million is required to restore Pakistan's MI-17 fleet to a 70 percent availability level over the next six months. End summary and introduction.

Pakistani Army Aviation Operations

12. (C) Pakistan Army Aviation has 40 MI-17s, five of which had been seconded to other GOP agencies (Note: The MI-17 that crashed on October 16 was one of these five. End note.) Information available to post's Office of Defense Representative - Pakistan (ODRP) and CENTCOM's Disaster Assistance Center (DAC) indicated that, as of October 26, ten (10) MI-17s have not been operational recently: six (6) are being overhauled; one (1) would be uneconomical to repair; one (1) suffered crash damage and two (2) have been identified as excess defense articles and are being cannibalized for parts. Of the remaining thirty MI-17s:

- four (4) are out of the country supporting UN missions
- four (4) are out of service for phased maintenance
- two (2) are out of service for inspection
- one (1) is out of service because of a rotor strike
- one (1) is out of service because of a tail boom strike by the main rotor
- eighteen (18) are available for EQ relief operations*

* Based on ODRP and DAC observations, post believes that true daily availability rate for Pak Army helos is closer to fourteen (14), as maintenance on each aircraft can take 1-2 days.

13. (C) Pakistan Army Aviation had budgeted for 5000 flying hours for the fiscal year beginning June 30, 2005. In the weeks since the October 8 earthquake, the MI-17 fleet has been flying at a dramatically accelerated operational tempo: Pakistan Army Aviation claims that it is flying an average of six (6) hours per operation aircraft per day. At this rate, Army Aviation will burn through its flying hour allotment for the year in the next month. The cost for 5000 hours of flying based on thirty (30) operational MI-17s is approximately USD 3 million. Pakistan Army Aviation planners estimate that 15,000 MI-17 flying hours will be required to support earthquake relief through April, based on thirty (3) available MI-17s, the current rate of operation and the eventual withdrawal of USG and other donors' rotary wing assets. The current budget to operate Pakistan's entire 380 ship aviation fleet is only USD 40 million.

14. (C) Pakistan Army Aviation is in danger of becoming Non-Mission Capable within a month; ODRP and DAC have already noted a significant degradation in available aircraft for daily sorties. Although Army Aviation Fleet Maintenance Chief BG Najeeb Tariq has requested additional funding for MI-17 parts and services, none has been forthcoming. Army Aviation maintenance personnel have shared their concerns with ODRP and DAC regarding the availability of parts in the mid- to long-term, as they are quickly consuming available stocks. (Note: Having ten MI-17s that are not operational has turned into a boon for the maintenance crews, which has been relying on stripping grounded aircraft for parts as a short-term panacea. End notes.)

15. (C) ODRP and DAC estimate that USD 16 million would be necessary to bring Pakistan's MI-17 fleet to a sustained 70

percent availability rate:

-- Restoration of one MI-17 with major damage: USD 1.2 million
-- Restoration of two EDA MI-17s cannibalized for parts: USD 1 million
-- Operational costs - 15,000 flying hours for thirty MI-17s over six months: USD 9 million
-- Previously contracted overhaul of six MI-17s: USD 4.8 million

16. (C) If Pakistani Army Aviation fails to maintain a 70 percent availability rate, post questions how the GOP will sustain relief operations throughout the winter. Many roads in the disaster area will soon be cut off by snow and/or future landslides. Army Aviation's heavy-lift MI-17 fleet is the only realistic mechanism for delivering supplies to earthquake survivors in isolated areas.

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